

The Whole Works

30 days to writing better.

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In November 2020, I, along with a group of kind-hearted friends, wrote about the tricks we have up our sleeves that makes us good writers. In this book, I bring together all the blog posts published in that month in one place. I hope this helps you make your writing journey at least a wee bit better.

Tl;dr: As Joan Didion once said, "see enough and write it down."

- Ranjani.

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30 Days To Writing Better.

Ranjani K

We writers can be assholes sometimes. Acting like we have some otherworldly skills. Looking down upon those who can't turn a phrase as effortlessly as we can. Whose argument is a wee bit wonky. Being nitpicky about the apostrophes and the dashes. We writers think we can change the world.

Well, good writing can.

But, this world-changing doesn't have to be a grand investigative piece in the New Yorker. It can be that considerate email you send a struggling colleague too.

Whether we accept it or not, we all write. Emails, whatsapp messages, memes, presentations, sticky notes, blog posts, case studies, love notes, resignation letters, tweets, Facebook posts, letters to the editor, letters to the police inspector seeking to file an FIR — words make the world go around.

So, writer or not, writing well can be immensely useful. And November 2020 is your 30 days to writing better. Every single day, we bring tips, tricks, and experiences to help you write well.

I'll do some writing myself. I've also asked a group of excellent and gracious writers to contribute. I'll keep you posted.

Oh wait, forgot today's tip: Subscribe to our bi-weekly newsletter (that's twice a week, on Thursdays and Sundays).

A Lesson from Fiction: Character, Conflict, Stakes.

Neeru Nagarajan

On Twitter, you'll find a lot of pitch fests where authors pitch their completed manuscripts to agents and editors. You get only 280 characters to introduce your 300+ page novel or nonfiction project. That's a lot of storytelling to compress into a tiny tweet! You can't afford to waste prime Twitter real estate on a meandering plotline. This means, your tweet must have a clear perspective.

Seems nearly impossible, right? But there's a way to do it.

Focus on three things: **character, conflict, and stakes.**

Introduce the character. Why should we care about your character? You can do this with a cleverly and strategically chosen adjective or adverb (or two; much to my detriment, I have no rules against adverb use). (e.g., "Monica is a high-strung chef obsessed with cleaning.")

Introduce what the character is after. What does the character want? What do they desire, crave? This is the central conflict. (e.g. "She's in love with her neighbor Chandler.")

Talk about what stands between the character and their goals. What are the stakes? What's to lose if the character doesn't meet their goal? What's to gain if they do? (e.g. "But they've been best friends forever. Chandler's also best friends with her brother Ross. With a lot of relationships at stake, can she go after this connection?")

This lesson comes in handy whether you have to condense a 3-hour movie or a trilogy of books into a quick summary. It helped me teach my students how to keep their focus razor-sharp, especially when wading through writing a novel — a truly daunting prospect.

But recently, working as a writer at emdash, I realised something: With a few tweaks, this lesson can help with literally any form of

writing — case studies, whitepapers, blogs, you name it.

For example, in a blog surrounding the effectiveness of a product/service, this would translate into a structure like this:

Here's what we're going to talk about. (Character: This could be "you"/ the reader, or even the solution we want to "sell.")

Here are the problems in the current scenario. (Conflict: The reader's left wanting for a solution.)

How can our product/service solve these problems? (Stakes: If the reader doesn't get the product/service, they'll be left with these problems. They need the product/service for these compelling reasons.)

No matter what you're writing, the main objective is to keep your reader reading. And if your writing is concise, focused, and urgent, your reader will want to know what's next.

Try it on any topic and any form, and let me know if it works for you!

This lesson comes in handy whether you have to condense a 3-hour movie or a trilogy of books into a quick summary

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Use Writing to Explore Your Confusion/Trauma.

Neeru Nagarajan

When I taught academic writing, my students and I frequently talked about how to mine past events for information, insights, and introspection. They were intimidated by the idea of exploring difficult experiences.

And I told them, "Write about your confusion even if you don't know what's causing it."

Later, when I read their papers, something like, "I never expected to look at it from this perspective," on page 3 would be a dead giveaway of how their writing had led them to a surprising revelation about themselves.

I'm recollecting this now as someone who's going through therapy for a past trauma. Somehow, I failed to take my own advice until my therapist suggested it. So I started journaling.

Here are a few lessons I've picked up in the process.

It's okay to maintain multiple journals.

I have two journals.

In my **gratitude/positivity journal**, I write about everything that makes me happy.

- My husband made me delicious coffee and brought it to my desk? My cat's curled up to me, warm and purring, and I feel loved? Every little

good thing matters.

- One of my professors once told me whenever she felt down, she'd remember everything she was good at, like, "I never let the dog's food bowl become empty." These notes help you appreciate yourself.
- I also write any goals I have for myself, even the most improbable ones. It's my way of telling myself it's okay to dream, want, believe, and deserve.

In my therapy/mood/memories journal, I maintain notes from my therapy sessions, keep track of my moods, and write down any memories I have from the past. It helps to stay organized and write things down as you remember them so you can study them later.

You don't have to journal every day.

I don't write every day. I write only when I'm moved to write. It takes the pressure off of me to be disciplined or stick to a routine.

Try journaling first thing in the morning.

If you feel you're exhausted and aren't able to get to it at the end of the day, try journaling before you start your day. As an overthinker, I wake up with plenty of feelings on many mornings. And when I tackle them in my journal right away, it helps me feel like I've dealt with them somehow before I set them aside and get productive.

Practice mindfulness when journaling.

Journaling is a fraught exercise: It's not easy to rehash past events that left a mark on us. That's why you have to be extra kind to yourself when you journal. You've done your best even if you've written one sentence. Use these mindfulness tips if you feel overwhelmed.

Write about how you feel.

Don't know what to write about? That's perfectly all right! You can start by writing

about how you feel right now, physically or emotionally. What's the sunshine like today? Is there anything you're looking forward to or worried about? Just be gentle with yourself and give yourself time.

Don't be afraid to seek out prompts.

I realised I was avoiding some difficult topics, so I asked my therapist for some prompts. Here are a few I got from her — feel free to use them or find your own!

- Write about your traumatic experience.
- Write about what you learned from the

experience, whether it's good or bad.

- How does the experience affect you now?
- Are there ways in which you can use your experience to help others?

Using writing as a way to explore your past or confusion about certain subjects is an endeavour that takes a lot of courage. And you should be very, very proud of yourself for taking that first step.

If you want to bounce ideas off or tell me how it's going, reach out!

04

I'm embarrassed about my past work.

Ranjani K

I studied at Manipal Institute of Communication. As part of our course, we were expected to put out a newspaper one semester. Everyone had to write something. I hadn't become a writer by then. So, I wrote some some thing about Happy Feet, the film, and filed. I didn't think much of it.

Later that day, I was walking down the corridor, when I heard my editor and sub-editor (both my classmates) reading my words and laughing. Out loud. I don't remember much else from that incident, but I remember the sound of that laughter. Strangely though, I'm not angry at the pair — one of them is now my best friend. I'm just embarrassed about the work I produced then.

I believe that embarrassment is truly what makes me a better writer now. Without putting those words out in the world, and opening myself up to criticism, I wouldn't have had the

chance to improve. Some will sit you down and tell you pleasantly. Some will laugh behind your back. I'm a film critic now, I should know.

Well, the point I'm making is: Being embarrassed about your past work doesn't mean you're bad. It just means you know what progress looks like. Laugh at your past and gear up for the future.

P.S: I once pronounced Shawshank Redemption as Shashaank Redemption while asking for the film's DVD from a roommate. I still remember the face she made, holding back her laughter.

P.P.S: I have also said ren-dess-vuss and linger-eee at one point. Like we often say re-syoom now

How Twitter banter helped find my voice.

Ranjani K

One boss once said, “You’re a different person on Twitter. But, when you write long-form, you get too propah. You lose your voice.” He was right. While writing essays, I was desperate to be taken seriously, not be tone-policed. So, I took the academic route. It was great while it lasted, but there’s truly no fun in that.

When I came out of that shell and started writing in what’s a more natural voice, I realised that my ideas also became less propah. I was finding fun ideas, quirky arguments that I would otherwise not have considered as serious writing at all. Take this one for Silverscreen, for instance.

Telugu Cinema, Where Were You Hiding Your Gentle Lovers All This While?

Erstwhile Ranjani would have made an academic argument about hyper-masculinity. Renewed Ranjani found meaning in musing about a tea-making lover. I must admit that thinking of writing as an extension of oneself liberated me from the shackles of what I thought was ‘acceptable’.

Who knew that Twitter me was more the real me!

You know you don't have to reply to every email immediately, right?

Ranjani K

A lot of us keep our inbox open all the time, like we need to know the moment something comes in. Many of us even open every email as soon as it arrives. Some of us jump to reply.

You know you don't have to, right?

I doubt anyone who sends an email expects an immediate response. If it's urgent, they'll

probably call — well, nothing is urgent anyway, but that story has already been told. Here's how I handle email:

- It's off while I'm writing / planning / doing immersive work. I also don't have notifications on my phone. We don't use Google Hangouts, so no reason to be online.
- I check email at specific intervals each day.

Now, because I have a team and do little writing myself, I check 4-5 times a day. Earlier it was only once or twice.

- I try to respond to all emails within 24 hours. And I endeavour to clear out all email before finishing the day. If I need more time, I reply saying, "I've seen this, I'll get back to it next week" and move it to my project management system.
- Those who need a response for their email within the day typically text me. Even that, I handle the same way I do email, unless I really like that person.
- Most of my customers know the rhythm, so when they email me, they know when I might respond. But then, if you typically

don't reply to emails, people will stop using that as a medium and call you instead. So, there's that.

Emails of The Whole Works, though, still haven't fallen into that rhythm. I've unread emails from over 3 days ago. I generally clear those off over the weekend or on Mondays.

In the long run, everyone gets used to it.

07

One remarkable thing about everything

Ranjani K

At emdash, I obsess about doing "great work", "remarkable content", "work we're proud of" etc. One intern earnestly asked:

You don't expect us to make every piece of content we write remarkable, do you?

Well, I do. But I also understand that it's not feasible. We're professional writers, we don't have the luxury of tinkering with something till we're entirely happy. We need to finish and ship things. Some of these are words that we have no control over after it's gone — as in, there is no fixing it later.

So, how do we still make our work great?

Make one thing about everything remarkable: A captivating lead. An ingenious insight. A rare piece of information. A thought-provoking argument. A creative alliteration. A clever turn of phrase. A naughty quote.

There always needs to be something that makes me look at it six months later and go, "ah! That's me!"

This for me is the pleasure of being the writer — a remarkable piece of me on everything I've touched, ok typed.

A simple potion that cures my writer's block

Ranjani K

Tea.

But that's useless to you. Hmm. Let me try and make this useful.

As a professional writer, I think of writing as 'work' — Wake up, wash up, write up is my typical routine. However, sometimes, especially when there is a lot at stake, I get what's fancifully called the writer's block. Basically, running out of ideas.

It is during these times that I do what I call rapid ideation, inspired by rapid prototyping from manufacturing and software development. For example, let's say my project management system tells me that I should write for The Whole Works today and I'm out of ideas. Here's what I'll do:

I'll put my laptop away and sit down with a notebook and pen. Often, in the balcony because fresh air helps. I'll write every idea that comes to mind. This list is often ugly AF. See!

- How to write on a leaf?
 - What pen do I use?
 - The mat I'm sitting on reminds me of the cover of Haroun and Sea of Stories. Wow, magical realism is a wonderful exercise in imagination. Is Ambai's *In a Forest, A Deer* also magical realism?
 - Are you setting boundaries for yourself? — Write about discovering you had a Twitter voice.
 - Damn, I'm a terrible writer, remember writing about Happy Feet? Oh wait.
 - I'm so bad at this. What! I've at least 3 workable ideas. I'm getting better at this.
- You see where I'm going? A lot of us fear ideation. We judge and reject our ideas without even giving them a chance. Rapid ideation takes the judgment away from this process. It treats every idea as a workable idea and voila!

(I vaguely remember reading that this is how regular brainstorming is supposed to be done. I can't recall where or when I read it. Maybe I'm just channeling that idea here.)

How to interview a film star

Subha J Rao

If you're new to film interviews, especially with a star, it's a given that there will be major excitement. Allow that to pass, and meet your subject as a professional.

This is most important for your story — it will spring from a place of equality. Your questions will be better, and not pander to egos, and your interviewee will respect that you respect yourself.

Before this even begins, prepare. Read up, check out earlier interviews, and ensure you've watched at least some of the work, especially if your subject is a senior artiste. If not, you'll only be taking down answers, not having a conversation.

Sometime after *Veyil* released, I interviewed its director Vasanthabalan for *The Hindu*. By the time the conversation was over, my eyes misted over. I got an interview in lyrical Tamizh, sprinkled with the director's raw angst. I hardly asked two questions from my prepared list. I picked up queries from his replies.

When drawing up questions, mix it up. You need some general questions to lead you into a conversation. Keep the most controversial question for the end. That way, you have your interview in hand, and you might get a bonus great answer.

Don't prod about artistes' personal lives. A star can fall in love and choose to keep it private, like any other regular person. A star's heartbreak is painful too. You need not know anything unless they choose to speak.

They go through traumatic times too. Sample this from 2003: I still remember hesitating to ask Ajith this. He was sitting in a hotel in Coimbatore, by the windowsill. My pen stopped working, and as I fumbled, he lent me his pen, and then I asked him if the yearning for "sweet revenge" had changed him as a person. "Time was when I was a very 'nice' person, when I valued emotions. Small things mattered. Like sitting by the window enjoying the *manvaasanai*. Today, I am setting goals and waiting to avenge my detractors," he said.

Seventeen years later, we know he meant what he said.

Another time, after an hour of conversation, Vikram spoke of how, had Sethu not worked out, he would have plucked apples and oranges in a friend's orchard in Australia.

These are from the days when you could call actors directly and they were willing to speak without filters.

A film interview is a peek into an artiste's soul. Which means, one steps in without pre-conditions. Expect the unexpected. And that makes for a truly great interview. Somewhere in the recesses of my phone recorder is an audio file of Vijay Sethupathi explaining how he nailed the rhythm in the drunken prawn sequence in *Kaadhalum Kadanthu Pogum*.

Trust is important. I spoke to Chinmayi for *Silverscreenindia.com* weeks before she named Vairamuthu in the MeToo movement. She told me what happened, but requested I not name him in the article. I waited for her to name her oppressor. That's the right thing to do.

Film writing is hard work too, and you build a

A film interview is a peek into an artiste's soul.

reputation for interviews based on your ability to listen. People like to be heard.

And a parting note. Avoid a photograph please. You're not a fanboy or fangirl!

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Ranjani's note: I also absolutely loved how Subha chose to highlight her points. In my world of corporate writing, we do listicles a lot — simpler to process, easier to skim, lends

well to click-bait headlines. Just like this one by Subha.

Yet, she chooses to weave her points into the article, like one would in an essay. And uses basic formatting, like making them bold, in case there is a skimmer or two in the audience.

I don't know if I'll ever interview a film star, but truly, these points are good for having any warm conversation.

10

Let us get it clear

Pankaja Srinivasan

As someone who has been editing for more years than she cares to remember, nothing infuriates me more than picking up a copy and not understanding what the story is all about. I feel offended.

For me, the bottom line is clarity — of thought, idea and the peg of the story. Once this is crystal clear, everything else that falls into place — the language, style, imagery, vocabulary, wit...

Here is what I do to avoid sounding vague and silly:

- Write the peg/core/thought of the story on top of the page in the simplest words possible.
- Write down the points I want to incorporate to support my story.
- Write in a way that even the reader not connected at all with the subject I am writing about, will take something away from it.
- I write and rewrite sentences so that there is no ambiguity in it. I hate it if something I write is misinterpreted only because I was not careful enough to be clear.

- If it is a story that has a lot of data, I ensure each number and data 'speaks'. It is there for a purpose and I will explain that purpose.
- If there are facts that I am using, I quote the source from where I have taken the fact. For example, if I am writing a story on paddy and I say the Minimum Support Price is Rs 1, 800 a quintal, I will also tell you I got that figure from the Agriculture Ministry's website. Just so you know that I did not manufacture that figure in my head. This kind of backing up of data and facts with their sources enhances a story and strengthens it.
- If someone has used words I wish I had, even if I am itching to pass them off as my own, I don't. I say where they came from.
- As writers please know what plagiarism is. It is a crime, one can be sued and it speaks very poorly of the writer's integrity if she has just cut/pasted stuff from someone else's work. If I must use matter from someone else's work, I give that person credit for that sentence, paragraph or data...

There are some simple things that can elevate copy, I have learnt over the years. Simple, simple, things. More about that in my next...

You really shouldn't take writing advice from me

Anjana Balakrishnan

I could tell you that you shouldn't take writing advice from me. Or I could say that I am barely a writer myself, having published only two short stories. My pup's biography and the #NaNoWriMo novel I am attempting on my blog do not count. I feel hugely ill equipped and embarrassed offering advice on how to write better when I have to look up whether to use 'advice' or 'advise' in this sentence. And that's my first tip for writing better—show, don't tell.

Exercise your skill

Ever since I was a child, I have been told that my talent lies in writing. Naturally, I grew up thinking that it was a gene-encoded skill. Until 2017, I never thought it necessary to practice writing. I was of the opinion that I would sit down at a desk when I was ready and a bestseller would pour out of me with urgency like a dam in breach. Then I took a year off work to write 10 short stories—putting my theory to the test. On day one, I sat down and nothing materialised. But since I had nothing better to do, I sat down every day writing whatever came to mind. Writing consistently, I found that I was able to articulate thoughts with unprecedented clarity. What I mean by this is the ability to turn a muddle of thoughts in my head into words on paper that capture the thought precisely.

If you ask me today, I would say that writing may be a skill but it is definitely a muscle. It gets better only with practice. And I lost that clarity I had gained through constant use when I went

back to work and writing took a back seat once again.

Write free, write better

For the longest time, I used to diss free writing as a waste of time. Free writing is penning your thoughts down without stopping to correct, judge or refine them. It's putting into words, your stream of consciousness, if you like. It could be in any language with mixed up tenses,

wrong spellings and incomplete sentences jumping across thoughts. The purpose is to write freely.

Socioculturally, we are so conditioned to

censoring our thoughts that free writing is not as easy as it sounds. Let's say I am free writing about 'women'. It could bring up deep set ideas of patriarchy and inferiority from within both of which are uncomfortable to admit to my feminist self. But with practice, this technique can bring out some of your truest writing too.

Editing while you write

Writing and editing are like those two roads that diverge in the woods. They never meet. And you can't walk them both at the same time. Writing is best done in the moment. Don't look back when you're writing. When you are writing, just write. You can always edit it later. As I see it, there are two problems with editing while writing. One is that you slow down your writing process. Anyone who has written knows that it can be a frustrating process without you adding to it. Secondly, what you are writing

When you are writing,
just write. You can
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today is not set in stone. A chapter could get deleted for continuity, a paragraph could get chopped for brevity, a portion could be realigned for better narrative arc. And just like that all the work you put in to make it just perfect goes to waste.

Note the point

The act of writing might be in the moment but the process of writing happens round the clock. When you read a book or wash dishes or go over a presentation or wind down for the night, you are constantly thinking of what you write. Consciously or otherwise, you are constantly honing your idea. Make it a habit to use an app or a physical notebook to jot down ideas before they vanish into the recesses of your brain. You could add structure to it as daily reflections if you like or you could just make random notes on an app as simple as Google Keep. Only thing to remember here is to make sure you know how to recall these cues a month or a year later. Otherwise, it could have been the best idea in the world but you won't know what a note on 'purple flying dogs' refers to.

Thank you for reading this because my last tip is to read more. The more you read, the more nuanced your world view becomes and the better you will write.

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Written by: Anjana Balakrishnan is an online communication and community specialist. Over the past 11 years she has led projects in content management and community engagement. She is also a published author, a dramaturg, and a grantee at Gender Bender 2019. She's currently writing her first novel, *Every Thing We Are*, as a series on her blog fictionhead.in.

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Ranjani's note: Anjana is my best friend in the whole wide world. She is the person who reads all the work that I'm nervous about. (I read a lot of her work too, by the way.) She writes such intricate and imaginative fiction on her blog, please go read, subscribe and support her.

12

There are two kinds of writers

Ranjani K

First one says, "I'm not a subject matter expert, I'm only a writer. You tell me what to write, I'll write."

The second one says, "I'll write what I understand and can teach others. I might not be the subject matter expert, but I know I am the translator of this message, and my understanding is critical here."

Guess which kind of writer is the better one?

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Writing is a pursuit of knowledge. Health journalists are responsible for the words they write — the accuracy and the clarity of it. Crime novelists are responsible for making sure

that their murderer's MO is actually plausible. Male writers are responsible for looking past women's breasts.

Whether you're writing fiction or nonfiction, you need to understand what you're writing about. And be able to defend it. Yes, that's what I said. You need to be able to defend your work. Things like, "that's what the client said, I don't know what it means, so I used it as it is" is lazy work. Hold yourself to a higher standard than that!

Here's how I know that the writer doesn't understand something or is not confident of her understanding:

Sentences get longer. Voice is unbearably passive. And the words mean nought. One would write, "the most important part of today's careers is that it is entirely data-driven, in that every part of it is driven by data". So, if you read a sentence and it sounds like bullshit, you know you didn't understand.

Circular logic! This is so common among

writers that you'd think writers are prone to circular logic. See what I did there?

Unnecessary repetition. If you're saying the same thing over and over, without adding anything new the next time, you're confused.

Creative obfuscation. One would write, ever so eloquently, "The world of data science is sometimes seen as unnavigable by those who come from milieus that haven't fostered an acquaintance with the cardinal integer, which isn't to say it's unachievable as much as uncomfortable as the hard seas." In essence, it's saying, "If you don't have a maths background, you might find data science hard."

Listen, dear writer, stop dancing around the problem. Understand the subject matter you're writing about — read books, watch videos, speak to people, do a little work yourself. And write from a place of confidence.

Don't bullshit the reader, they're giving you their time, you better make good use of it.

Keeping a tab on your tabs

Neeru Nagarajan

Whether it's for writing or not, I do research. Sometimes, it's for work. Sometimes, I'm just curious about how Conde Nast's Bon Appetit went down in flames. Research is always a good thing — it lets me cross-pollinate ideas. But mostly, it involves opening gazillion tabs on my browser — so many that I don't even know which one is for what. It's a super frustrating experience. The worst part is when my browser crashes because it can't take the overload.

When this kept getting out of hand, I had to come up with some rules.

Open a new window whenever I need to research a new topic, for work or otherwise. When I'm done researching (not finishing the whole project, because that might take days), I close the whole window.

Use bookmarks wisely. Bookmarking important pages is a really great way to keep a list of your links. I use it sparingly; I find

that this works best when you need to keep a reference close at hand or an important resource you don't use often, like syntax for a programming language I'm trying to learn, for example.

Maintain a resources file. As a writer, I have to cite my sources, so it helps to maintain a list of websites and pages that I find the most relevant. I'm very specific when I write down what it is (e.g., "Digitisation in India – McKinsey [2020]"). And then, I hyperlink it. Especially if I find insights or data from it that I fully intend to use in my blog post, I'll copy-paste the sentence under this source. This helps me keep track of my research and go back to it whenever I need, and I don't have to click on every link to find out what it is.

Use a session manager like Session Buddy. A true life saver! It's a simple Google extension that lets me save a collection of tabs under a specific name (e.g. "Research for new story"). Whenever you need to reopen and revisit all your tabs at once, you just have to launch that session.

I hope these ideas help make the process of research more organised and enjoyable for you! Let me know how it goes.

14

When you're scared, write on spec.

Ranjani K

Do you want to write but worry that no one would read your work? Ever wonder if you're a writer after all? Ever been so paralysed by how terrible the output might be that you never start?

Write on spec.

Before I explain, allow me to tell you a story. Sometime between 2016-17, I was in a terrible sort of headspace. I was scared out of my wits to write, even share an opinion. I was scared that I'd be attacked online for being a stupid person. I was petrified that I'll be questioned about my opinion and I won't be able to defend myself. So, I kept quiet. I was in hiding.

Thankfully, this was a problem I was seeing a shrink for. She told me, "See ma, first you write.

We'll see."

So, I wrote a nearly 1700-word long piece about how Jyothika's Magalir Mattum was a fabulous film. I included everything I loved. I responded to every piece of criticism anyone ever laid on it. I protected it like it was my own. I wrote and wrote and wrote.

I did all this while I had work and life that kept me going. The stakes were low. If my speculation didn't work, it was only a few hours lost. Acknowledging that I'm doing this speculatively meant that I wasn't working myself up about the response. At least not yet.

Once done, I went back to see my shrink. She said, "great, now, send it to your favourite editor and see if they'd like to publish it." Well, by

the time I gathered the guts to pitch a story, Magalir Mattum was passe, but I slowly got over the fear. So much so that, these days, I file my opinion about films in just a couple of hours after watching it.

🙄 Who'da thunk, right?

(Side note: Apparently, everyone around me knew. I was the only one who thought I'd lost my ability to write. :P)

Anyway, back to the story. In essence, on-spec is what my doctor asked me to do. On-spec (on a speculative basis) is just a fancy Hollywood term for writing without a buyer. Work that isn't commissioned. Don't think of the 'speculation' part as scary, think of it as adventurous, and keep writing. Courage will come.

See ma, first you write. We'll see.

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P.S: Writing on spec isn't a great practice for every story you want to pitch, by the way. Editors reject ideas all the time. If you keep writing everything entirely before you pitch, you'll be wasting A LOT of time.

My advice here is to write on spec when you're too scared, paralysed or in doubt. Once you're over the obstacle, pitch first.

15

What would you do differently?

Ranjani K

During the time I was doing screenwriting — on the job, for a short while — there is something I learned from a colleague, who has now become a friend. If you don't like it, rewrite it.

Wait! It's not what you're thinking.

Over many evenings, outside a rather stuffy office in Anna Nagar, this friend and I would talk about popular, highly successful or critically acclaimed films that he didn't like. I'd ask him why he didn't like it. He'd explain it to me.

I'd also ask him, "what would you have done differently?" Sometimes, he'll rewrite parts of the film and narrate it to me.

I'd come back home and secretly tried to rewrite films that I didn't like. Giving women more agency. Giving the men more sensitivity. Making some parts less coincidental. Making some motives more real. You know, things that typically bothered me. In this process, I learned a whole lot about why films are the way they are, and how much more work it is to actually write better.

The critic's way towards creating something is as legit as an amateur's way. Pick any piece of writing you dislike — a novel, a short story, a film, a rude email, a Christmas wish, a love letter you yourself wrote badly. Rewrite it. What would you do differently?

.,! — We need some space

Sruthi Radhakrishnan

Looking forward to see you !'

Read that sentence. What pops out for you? For me, being a lifelong editor (a former colleague used to joke that we were editors till death do us part — சாகும்வரை sub-editor), it's the space before the exclamation mark. It annoys me to no end and my fingers are already inching towards that line to fix it.

Most people would not look askance at a line like that. In fact, it might even be the way things are for them. But if you're sending lines filled with punctuation like this to someone else who is editing it, or reading it, it doesn't send great signals about you as a writer.

These are insignificant things, you say. But they aren't. A cousin of mine would re-read every email before he sent it, sometimes thrice, just to make sure it was error-free. When I was younger, this seemed like a strange practice to me. Now, I do the same thing. An attention to detail only means that you really care about what you write, not that you're a pedant.

There are, of course, other punctuation marks which are based on style guides. The em dash is one of them. I prefer a space before and after, because every newsroom I've worked at followed that style. Ranjani puts a space before and after a slash (/), I keep taking it out, like our own little Google Docs war, but there are no set rules for that. In those cases, it's about personal preference.

I've long held that there are two kinds of people in the world — those that use punctuation out of place in texts and those who don't. It's pretty obvious which category I fall in. And now I have made it my job to bring more people into the second one. Give your punctuations some space, but after, not before.

—

Written by Sruthi Radhakrishnan, who is a writer at emdash, after a 10-year stint in journalism, who obsesses over little details. She can be found @sruthirk on Twitter.

Whether you write literature or not, literary devices can be useful. A good analogy can help explain something better. A delightful irony makes a story more attractive. Some humour helps engage your reader. Some hyperbole helps provoke them.

Here are some of my favourites.

Synecdoche: A part of something referring to the whole like 'demonetisation' as a symbol of the government's abysmal financial policy, for instance. I use this often in my film reviews, where I use a scene or a dialogue as representative of the whole film.

Literary Devices

Ranjani K

Rhyme: I have such childish love for internal rhyme. I was disproportionately pleased with this closing sentence of my Soorarai Pottru review: "He is the man we want to be. And Kongara is the writer and director, more of whom, we want to see."

Alliteration: This is perhaps from my Tamil roots, but I love alliterations. If there needs to be more than one example in my work, it will likely be alliterative.

Euphemism: In corporate writing, you can't call things nasty names. So, you say "legacy systems" when we mean "old shit that doesn't work".

Anecdotes (technically called parables): Most of The Whole Works is anecdotes, isn't it?

Isocolon: A series of sentences that have the same number of words / syllables. "In god, we trust" or "think problem, think brand" type things. I love the rhythm it creates when used in successive sentences.

There are also a few others that I commonly use, an analogy to explain something, an allusion to past cinema, a metaphor, a simile, a cliché, innuendo, even grandiloquence on a bad day.

As I was researching this piece, I realise that we all use some of these literary devices, without really knowing there is a name for that. Wikipedia has a long list. Some day, I'll spend time to formally learn the various literary and stylistic devices, and figures of speech.

For now, which ones do you use / like? Tell tell.

Use text-to-speech

Ranjani K

Good writing is about the rhythm of the words. It's more about how it 'sounds' than how it reads. Whether read aloud in a crowd or a silent voice in the reader's head, good writing needs to sound good.

One thing that has ensured this over the years is text-to-speech. Mac has an inbuilt way to have anything be read to you. MS Word has this feature, so does Google Docs. With a click of a few buttons, you can have a wonderful voice read your work back to you.

Use it.

It catches typos: I once wrote, "I'm drawing on my shit" when I meant shirt. And I didn't see it while proof-reading (it's very difficult to see your mistakes while you're proofing your own stuff).

It identifies strange sentence construction.

It makes repetition evident. If you use the same word twice in a sentence, you'll hear it. If you're saying the same thing over and over, you'll hear that too.

It'll point out any auto-correct that you didn't notice. In the previous sentence, Google Docs had auto-corrected 'sentence' to 'stance' for some reason!

It highlights your jokes. If you've slid in a joke and it doesn't work, you'll know!

So, if you're a writer, and want to write better, use the damn text-to-speech feature.

Mapping your story saves a ton of time!

Sruthi Radhakrishnan

Remember how I said I had a story mapping notebook. Some may find this odd, but this is a small trick that has always worked for me when writing.

When it comes to flow and structure, I have a lot of trouble just writing paragraph after paragraph. That kind of writing doesn't come naturally to me.

So, this is my trick. I outline a story before I write it. Many writers do this. It helps you focus on what you want to write and stick to it throughout the piece.

My outlines are detailed. I decide what each

para is going to be and what segues to use.

An example if I were writing a profile of a person:

Para 1: Begin with something the person is doing.

Para 2: Introduce the person. Compress it in two sentences. The connect will be to a quote by the subject.

Para 3: QUOTE. Connect this to a peer's quote. And so on.

If this seems time-consuming, let me assure you that it is not. Once I write the outline, the actual writing becomes far easier. There is no hesitation in writing, it just flows.

And yes, I have a separate notebook for it — a large A4 sized ruled notebook. Why large? That way the entire story outline can fit into one page and I won't miss anything. I even use it to create a thinking map. This is one of those maps where you have one phrase in the middle and several around it, connecting to it.

A thinking map helps you retain the backbone of the piece you're writing and ensures you include everything that is relevant to it.

Open a nice notebook (always a source of joy for me). Map out your story in detail and watch the words flow.

First Drafts Are Allowed to Be Shitty

Neeru Nagarajan

A lot of us never get started on our dream projects, because when we get ideas in our minds, they're already perfect. We have a fantastic vision. But what if our writing doesn't match that vision? What if the first sentence we write never lives up to our ambition?

Even the most experienced writers are plagued with this inertia and fear. I can't say I'm particularly good at it, but over the years, I've come up with some ways to get myself working instead of stalling.

Remind yourself that editing exists.

Great stories and books weren't written in one try. They went through plenty of edits and revisions before they got polished into what you read!

Learn to edit and revise better. A lot of us are frightened of editing because we think that we don't edit as well as we can write. But editing, like writing, comes with practice. When you're done with a piece, try to put some distance between you and the piece (especially if you're not under a tight deadline) and then revisit it when you feel you can look at it objectively.

I like printing it out and marking with a pen as I go over it. If worse comes to worst, you could always recruit a trustworthy friend to give it a quick glance.

Have a “first draft and final draft” process. I told my students that the first draft is a rough version in which they can brainstorm ideas in any form. They could submit outlines, just unorganised ideas, first-person narratives of what they wanted to do in the final version. The first draft is where they were allowed to go wild. And they’d get full points as long as they submitted something. And that really let them loosen up and brainstorm ideas without feeling restricted.

Embrace freewriting. This feeling of insecurity is the first step to a full-blown writer’s block! But understand it’s not the end of the world if you don’t immediately know how to start this perfect project of yours. Natalie

Goldberg has a few great ideas and prompts for how to freewrite in her book *Writing Down the Bones*. I’d highly recommend it.

Don’t talk about your project until you’re done. Especially for creative projects, I’ve noticed writers could build anticipation and excitement by not talking about their project until they had something to show the world. This works for some.

Or... Talk about your project until you’re done. Some people work better when they have an accountability partner. Or when they’ve told someone they’re working on something. If you’re one of them, this might be for you.

Read “Shitty First Drafts.” And reread it if you get stuck again. I can’t emphasise how much it helped my students every time. Just putting things into perspective had such a positive effect on them.

I have an idea!

Sruthi Radhakrishnan

I have multiple notebooks. For anyone who writes, this shouldn’t come as a surprise. Each notebook has a designated purpose — gratitude journal, to-do notebook, daily journal, and so on.

For work, I’ve always had three notebooks at a time. One is my to-do, daily, weekly and monthly. Another is my story mapping notebook. This is where I write structure for all my stories, outlining where quotes come, what the segues are, etc. The third is my story ideas notebook.

An ideas notebook has held me in good stead all these years. Every time I had a brainwave, which always happens at odd times, I recorded it in the ideas notebook. Many ideas didn’t pan out. Some that did ended up being published.

If you're wondering why I'm saying this, it's to exhort you to have a similar one (or a Google Doc, if that's what you're comfortable with). This is not revolutionary, but it's a simple solution to that moment when you're racking your brain for a new idea.

Inspiration can be tricky. It rarely strikes you at the time you need it. This has been one of my go-to methods to get inspired and start writing. It doesn't matter if the idea is strange or just plain bad. When I go back to read these notebooks, I usually end up with a new idea.

This year has been a setback in this front. Yes, 2020 has been a shit year for everyone, and for me, the ideation I've had all year is suicidal. But with help, I've begun a new notebook recently, towards the end of the year. And my ideas are back, even if they don't sound so great right now. It's a start. A slow march towards normalcy.

Keep one for yourself. Write it all down, quality notwithstanding, and go back to it on a day where you don't feel productive. It works.

Reference your sources properly

Ranjani K

As a marketing content writer, fake news isn't probably one of your big problems. Or is it?

The Internet is full of quotable quotes — Rumi couldn't possibly have said everything that we allege he did; random studies — 128% of website visitors leave within the first 30 milliseconds; and statistics that tell stories about industries that grow to tens of trillions of dollars each year.

All of these are things that we, as writers, believe to add credibility to our writing can do so only if they're accurate. And to make sure of it, you need to source them properly. Here are some ways we, at emdash, approach it.

1. Find the original source. Don't go by the first link you find. Ask 'according to whom' and then keep reading. For instance, if a news article claims that Gartner says something, see if Gartner have themselves published that report. If someone is quoted on a blog, see if there's a video recording of it and reference that.

2. Use reliable sources. In the days I went to college, we were taught that news publications, magazines and books were reliable. This still holds true to a large extent. Use publications you trust. Even then, see if you can triangulate the information.

We were taught specifically not to reference Wikipedia. Turns out, in the last

ten years, Wiki has become more reliable than many news publications. Anyway, if you're using Wiki, scroll down and find the original source.

You'll also find a lot of "studies" sponsored by or conducted by businesses to make a point. Steer clear of them, if you can.

3. Avoid info that has circular references. An e-book quotes a paper, the paper quotes a study and the study quotes the e-book — basically no one knows where it started or if it's true. These tend to be unfounded and mythical. Leave them be.

4. Always verify from 2-3 sources if the information you're using is right. For instance, if any study finds that the

manufacturing industry is 10 trillion dollars worth, see if there are other sources that have estimated similar numbers.

5. Before you use it, question it. Ask yourself if it really makes sense. If it feels odd or incomplete, keep looking. Don't reference something that feels suspicious to you.

Now, while writing, make sure you quote the source. Don't just use it like you invented it yourself. 😊 For instance, include, "As per a Gartner report" in your story.

And then hyperlink it. It's not reliable unless it's referenced.

Dear sir / madam, please don't hire me

Gowri

Writing out a job application? Please — PLEASE — don't make these bloopers.

There's plenty of advice out there about what not to do on your first date. So we all know asking "How many kids do you want to have?" is a bad idea. Unfortunately, not a lot of people—nope, not just freshers—seem to know what not to do when applying for a job.

Over the years, I have hired for roles in training, marketing, customer service, content and design and seen even experienced applicants making the same mistakes again and again. Here are some things to avoid the next time you apply for a job.

Dear Sir/Madam...

Would you sign off an email with "Your obedient servant"? Then why would you begin one with "Dear Sir/Madam"? Salutations such as these are relics of the colonial era and best left there.

Open your email by addressing your recruiter/hiring manager by name. Finding this name isn't difficult, especially if you are applying through a portal like LinkedIn.

If you can't find their name, open with a simple, "Hello". It's simple, friendly, and the perfect balance of formal and casual.

Other openings to avoid: Greetings! (You are not a greeting card); Hi! (Too casual for a professional setting, even if you know the hiring manager in person); Good morning/evening (You don't know when they are going to open/see the email.)

The boilerplate resume

One time, I was hiring writers for our marketing team. The feelers I had put out clearly mentioned the role and description. I had also included a line that said 'If you don't fit the role to a T, but would like to give it a shot, tell us why and knock our socks off.' Yet, the number of boilerplate resumes I got from software testers and sales professionals for this role was astounding.

It is frustrating for hiring managers to know that you don't care enough to tweak your resume or write a few lines on why you're keen on the role. So please make an effort to customize your resume and email for the job at hand.

A tip: Every brand has a distinctive tone of voice and this is usually reflected in their recruitment listings as well. Try and mimic this voice/tone in your covering letter— if the firm is funny, be funny; if they are formal, be formal. This is a subtle way of letting them know that you're listening and you're a good fit.

Objective? No, thanks.

A lot of candidates still open their resume with a 2-3 line objective. And most of the time, what they say here is so generic as to be pointless! Your objective (right now at least) is to get this job. Most hiring managers I know just skip this part and move to your work experience.

A statement of purpose inside your resume is not just an outdated practice, but it also takes up valuable space that you could use to talk about more important things: like your professional accomplishments, learning, or skills.

A tip: If you do have something specific and meaningful to say that you want your prospective employer to know, put it in your covering letter.

Dis is nt gud

The other day, a candidate wrote to me asking for more information about a JD I had shared. Their email went something like this: "Hey, cud u fwd me the link to d website? i want to know more about the job"

I replied: "Gr8! here u go."

I suspect the sarcasm was lost on him.

SMS slang is not acceptable in any formal context. It makes you come across as juvenile or careless, and these are real turn-offs for hiring managers. So take those few extra minutes to compose full sentences.

You are awesome. But where's the proof?

How does a potential employer know that you are a good writer or designer or social media strategist? Sure, you could tell them, but it's even better if you show them.

It is ALWAYS a good idea to share your portfolio or work samples along with your resume. Not only does this make a great impression, it also speeds up the process. Because if you send this proactively, they don't have to write back asking for one.

If you don't have a portfolio yet, invest the time to make one. You could use a portfolio app like Behance or Coroflot (for designers), Contently or WordPress (for writers), or Wix. If none of this is okay, at least put your creatives / work samples on a Google Drive and share the link with the recruiter. Personally, I dislike having to download large zip files and would rather view them online.

A tip: If you have a lot of work you could showcase, don't send the entire dump. Choose your best work OR the work that's most relevant to the job at hand. Again, this

takes a few extra minutes, but I can assure you it is worth it.

Good luck with that next application/pitch!

24

Write to understand

Sairam Krishnan

The most precious writing of my life is in a letter a girl wrote me. I read it once, when I had already fucked our relationship up beyond saving. I remember phrases from it, and I would give an arm to read it again. But I know I never will. She told me she wrote it to make sense of why she had fallen in love with me, not to send it to me.

I understood.

If that sounds like a tough way to understand things, it is. Sometimes that's what it takes.

Because most of my writing is just that: a way to make sense of my own ideas, ambitions, and failings. I have never been unsure of that: That my writing is an attempt, mostly, to understand.

Over the last year, I have been able to write something consistently: A newsletter, constructed in essays, on marketing. Has it been successful? Within a circle, yes. Can it have a wider readership? Yes. Can I hustle to make that possible? Yes.

But that's not why I'm writing what I'm writing. I'm writing because for a long time I was not sure of myself as a marketer. I got good at it gradually, building skills and momentum and confidence. And the newsletter is an attempt to articulate where I've come with my marketing. If you understand, I'm writing to understand.

And that's exactly why I think it has become valuable for others. They recognise my writing as an attempt to make sense, and it attracts those like me – trying, thinking marketers – and they stay. And read.

So what I'm trying to say is this: Don't write to make a point, to expound, to hold forth. Write to understand, to make sense, to assimilate, to categorise, to classify – even if all of this is just for yourself, especially if all of this is just for yourself.

And if sometimes that's a love letter you never send, so be it. Whoever it is for will understand.

Writing for an audience

Gowri

Whether you've just graduated from college or you've a life-long journalistic career behind you, the one thing you haven't probably practiced is the idea of writing for an audience.

I've been writing for an audience for so long that I hadn't realised that many people don't. It became apparent only when I hired writers for emdash and I realised that they often write to inform, while I've practiced to write to persuade.

Well, naturally. A journalist's job often is to inform people. State facts, present evidence, be clear. This is what most journalism schools teach. However, a content writer's job is to persuade — behind all the educating and informing, there is an implicit goal of making the audience buy a product.

Think of a professional blog you regularly read — a tech company, an online educator, an influencer and so on. Haven't you noticed that between their useful words, there is a plug for their own product?

Some may be immediate calls to sale, some may be what we marketers call long-term nurturing. But, this is the way of the Internet — content is a sales tool.

So, if you're a content writer, it is important to realise that you're

Writing to sell

To a specific audience

Who is persuaded by specific features

That give them specific benefits

Your content is a means to this end. Your content needs to make your client's product the right answer to a customer's problem. So, the next time you write content for a business, think about an audience persona, identify their particular problems, map those problems to the solution your client is offering, and build a story around that. It's more likely to produce results.

How to write an explainer

Megha Kaveri

"Explain like I am a five-year-old," (ELI5) is an oft-heard statement in the start-up circles. For the uninitiated, it means "break your concept/idea down to the bare minimums, good enough for a child to understand." Explainers work around a similar concept.

The main aim of putting together an 'explainer' write-up is to enlighten the reader about something. It can be the most basic of information, or it can be something advanced or technical, based on the target audience.

Personally, writing an explainer is an exercise in seeking knowledge. To put an explainer

together, the writer needs to have in-depth knowledge about the topic. They can choose to acquire it by extensive reading, questioning experts or talking to those who will stand impacted by the said topic.

That is not to say that an explainer can condescend to the reader. ELI5 is just another variation of “write like it can be understood by the town barber and the Mayor”. The beauty lies in simplicity.

Now, to writing itself, there are several ways in which one can write an explainer. It can be in a question-answer format or one with a lot of tiny sub-heads or one with just bullet-points, you get the idea. I am a fan of the question-answer format, because I feel it is a lot more informal that way. But hey, whatever works for you.

Another good thing about an explainer is that it can be as long or as short you want it to be. You will have the creative liberty to break a topic into several aspects and write an explainer on each of those aspects. There are no rigid rules to be followed. The important point is to ensure that the reader closes the browser tab a bit more knowledgeable than he was when he clicked on your URL.

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Ranjani’s note: While Megha writes from her journalism experience, absolutely anyone can do this. For instance, while writing process documents within emdash, I use a similar process. While writing briefs for your designers, you can use this. Explainers are a great way to teach people things, whatever you want to teach in your everyday life.

27

How to pitch a story.

Megha Kaveri

In an era of ‘elevator pitches’ and shaky job security, it is as important as ever to network and have a back-up source of income. If not for anything, at least to have a semblance of financial independence. Freelancing is as big an industry as it is vague and undefined. There are no hard and fast rules here. The competition is heavy as well. All that matters is what you, as a contributor, can bring to the table.

Writing story pitches is probably the most important part of journalism. Not only does it help the commissioning editor (the one who approves of your idea as being worthy of doing a story) to see what you can bring to their product, but also fine tune the idea you have in your mind about the topic.

Here are some pointers to keep in mind when writing a story pitch:

Do your research about the publication. You cannot send in a story pitch about labour rights to a publication that extensively reports on the environment. It would be the bare minimum to know the broad genre of the publication.

Always begin with a (tentative) headline. That will help you narrow your story down while elaborating on it in the pitch. Of course, when drafting the pitch, the headline can be the last thing you write. But, when you send that email, put the headline first.

Ideally divide the pitch into three sections.

The headline, the description and the sources you will speak to, to substantiate the story.

The description will be an explanation of what the story will talk about. The hows, whats and the whys basically. This is the point where you explain what you will be bringing new to the existing narrative (if any) on the topic.

The description portion is also the part where you would need to deploy your convincing skills to the max. Here's a trick I was taught by one of my professors that can help you to a great extent in getting your pitch approved: After every important sentence in this part, ask yourself this question — 'So what?'. If you can convincingly answer this, it means you have a decent pitch.

The last part is about your sources. You can possibly give a broad idea of the range of voices you will be getting for your story. For example you can say — I aim to speak to the people who have been affected by this. I will also speak to the local legislator, the bureaucrat who was incharge of this aspect, a few activists and ground level workers who have repeatedly helped these affected people out and some academics to get a fuller picture of the issue.

Always make your pitch elaborate. It helps in conveying your passion and sincerity in working on the story and also helps the commissioning editor to give a real thought about the story.

Happy pitching!

28

How does one get into freelance writing?

Ranjani K

Earlier this week, Joanna Lobo of It's All Write interviewed me for her newsletter. Her first question was:

This is a question I am often asked. How does one get into freelance writing? Is there a procedure, a set of rules to follow?

It's an interesting question to me because I didn't start freelancing deliberately. I was unceremoniously fired from a job and I started freelancing as an interim arrangement until I found 'proper' work. This is perhaps why it worked for me. I didn't think too hard, I jumped head in. Because I was sure that the consequences of failing couldn't be worse than being fired.

The pay-offs have been extraordinary. :) But I'm digressing.

In my opinion, one becomes a freelance writer by doing it.

If you'd like to be a freelance journalist, pitch to editors.

If you'd like to be a freelance content writer, respond to job/gig postings. You'll find many on Twitter and LinkedIn.

If you already are a specialist or expert in something, build on it. If you know a lot about handicrafts, for instance, begin your freelancer writing journey there.

You are likely to have a network — however small — ping them and let them know you're available for work.

Just do the work. Don't fuss too much about the right way to start. In just a year's time, your freelance career would be very different from what it is now. Let it evolve with you. For now, do.

I've answered nine other questions in the recent edition of Joanna's newsletter. Do subscribe, she curates some incredible resources for freelance writers.

Joanna's News Letter:
<https://joannalobo.substack.com/>

29

Brainstorm like Tina Fey does improv

Ranjani K

If you know Tina Fey, you probably know the one lesson from her book *Bossypants* that she's widely talked about. She explains it in this Google Talk too :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8Mkufm3ncc>

While you're doing improv, avoid 'no, but'. Use 'yes, and' instead.

The funda is that when you're building something out of nothing, it helps to accept and add rather than deny and kill it. Watch the first 30 seconds of the above linked video to see this in action.

I think this works exceptionally in brainstorming as well.

Typically, when we brainstorm, people have the urge to play 'devil's advocate'. And this kills potentially good ideas like the BJP government kills my hope.

When this (people playing devil's advocate in brainstorming sessions, I mean) happened to me in the early days of my career, I'd be hurt. It would make me guarded and not share stuff I'm not entirely sure about. I've seen this happen over and

over again to many people in group conversations. Now that I'm older and have a thicker skin, I brainstorm better. I also try to lead brainstorms better. We explore every idea, however bad it seems. We first assume that every idea is a good one and attempt to build on it. In fact, even when we realise it's not working, we put it away for later, in case its time comes in the future.

This is also how I brainstorm with myself.

So, the next time you're brainstorming, practice to say, "yes" and add to the idea (however bad it sounds to you initially). Maybe something will come off it and surprise you. Maybe it won't and you'll realise it soon enough.

P.S: This is not to say all ideas are good — of course not. It is simply to say that in a group setting, it's best not to disregard ideas before they're completely formed. After all, it's a brainstorming session, not a paper presentation, press release or a tweet. :P

Contributors

Ranjani K is a writer, entrepreneur, film critic, advice giver, kuppai padam enthusiast and worksmith at The Whole Works.

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Subha J Rao is a consultant writer and editor, now based out of Mangaluru, Karnataka. She's been covering Tamil cinema for about 17 years, and Kannada for four years. Before Covid-19 struck, you would have found her and her bag catching the first day first show of every Tamil film that released in solitary splendour.

Pankaja Srinivasan is a Coimbatore-based reporter editor with more than 30 years experience working across publications, including, Eve's Weekly, Indian Express, Newstime, Deccan Chronicle, India Today and The Hindu. She retired from The Hindu in June this year as a senior deputy editor after nearly 15 years.

Anjana Balakrishnan is an online communication and community specialist. Over the past 11 years she has led projects in content management and community engagement. She is also a published author, a dramaturg, and a grantee at Gender Bender 2019. She's currently writing her first novel, Every Thing We Are, as a series on her blog fictionhead.in.

Sruthi Radhakrishnan is a writer at emdash, after a 10-year stint in journalism, who obsesses over little details. She can be found @sruthirk on Twitter.

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Sairam Krishnan is a reader, writer, and marketer in that order. You can find him on Twitter at @_sairamkrishnan.

Megha Kaveri is a journalist, working for The News Minute. Based out of Chennai, she has been working as a reporter for over two years. When not working she thrives on music,

The Whole Works